Religious versus Secular Politics: Competing Ideologies in a Changing System

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Abstract
The increasing number of religious conflicts and the new focus that accompanied it mostly failed to establish a connection between their arguments and what we observe in the real world. In many of these studies the discrepancy was caused by the conceptualization of the term "religious conflict." While many chose to focus solely on conflicts between groups from different religions or sects, we argue that a wider approach is needed. Instead of basing our case selection on religious or sectarian differences, one needs to look at conflicts that center around the issue of religion in general. The resurgence of religion movements following the recent regime changes in the Middle East requires societies to re-define the role of religion in politics. Since a large number of religious tensions present around the world does not turn violent, we believe one first needs to determine the factors influencing the likelihood and the level of violence in conflicts over the role of religion. Two factors appear to be important: institutional strength and belief system. In order to test this argument we turn our attention to Egypt where following the fall of Mubarak the main axis of conflict is over the role religion will play in the new political system.

Keywords: Egypt; Middle East, Regime change; Religion; Political institutions

Dini Siyasete Karşı Laik Siyaset: Değişen Sistemde Rekabet Eden İdeolojiler

Özet
Sayıları artan dini çatışmalar ve bunların doğurduğu ilgi öne sürülen görüşlerle gerçek dünyada gözlemlediklerimiz arasında bir bağlantı kurma konusunda başarısız oldu. Bu çalışmaların büyük bölümündeki uyuş-

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mazlık “dini çatışma”nın kavramsallaştırılmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu farklı din veya mezheplerden gruplar arasındaki çatışmalara odaklanırken biz daha geniş bir yaklaşımın benimsenmesi gerektiğini düşünüyoruz. Örnek seçimimizi dini veya mezhepsel farklılıklar üzerinden yapmak yerine din konusu üzerinden ortaya çıkan çatışmaların ele alınması daha yerinde olur. Ortadoğu’da gözlemlediğimiz rejim değişikliklerinin ardından dini hareketlerin yükselişe geçmesi toplumların dinin siyasetteki rolünü yeniden tanımlaması ihtiyacını doğurmaktadır. Dünya üzerindeki dini çatışmaların büyük bölümünün şiddet içermemesi dikkate alındığında yapılması gereken ilk şey şiddet olasılığı ve düzeyini etkileyen faktörlerin belirlenmesi olmalıdır. İki faktör önemli görünüyor: kurumların gücü ve din. Bu teorimizi test edebilmek için Mübarek’in devrilmesi sonrasında temel çatışma ekseni din olan Mısır’ı ele alacağız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mısır; Ortadoğu; Rejim değişimi; Din; Siyasi kurumlar

السياسات الدينية ضد العلمانية: تنافس الأيديولوجيات في نظام متغير

كورشاد طوران و مندیریس جینار

خلاصة:

إن ازدياد الصراعات الدينية والتركيز الجديد الذي صحبه قد فشل فشلا كبيرا في تأسيس رابط بين ادعائتهم وبين ما نلاحظه في العالم الواقعي. في كثير من الدراسات نتجت التناقضات بسبب تبني فكرة مصطلح « الصراع الديني ». بينما اختار الكثيرون التركيز فقط على الصراعات بين المجموعات من أديان أو طوائف مختلفة، ونحن نناقش فكرة تتمحور على ان هناك حاجة لتقارب اكبر. وبدلا من تركيز الاختيار على الأديان أو الخلافات الطائفية، يحتاج الشخص إلى أن ينظر على الصراعات التي تتمحور حول قضية الدين بشكل عام. إن انبعاث الحركات الدينية بعد تغيير الأنظمة الأخيرة في الشرق الأوسط يتطلب من المجتمات إعادة تعريف دور الدين في السياسة. وحيث أن الكثير من التوترات الدينية حاضرة في العالم ولم يتحول إلى عنف، فإننا نعتقد أن المرء يحتاج إلى تحديد العوامل التي تؤثر بشكل محتمل جدا على مستوى العنف في الصراعات على دور الدين. وهناك عاملان مهمان: القوة المؤسسية ونظام العقيدة. ومن أجل اختبار هذه الحجة فقد وجهنا اهتمامنا إلى مصربعد سقوط مبارك والمحور الرئيسي للصراع هو حول الدور الديني الذي سيلعبه في النظام السياسي الجديد.

الكلمات الدالة: مصر، الشرق الأوسط، تغيير النظام، الدين، المؤسسات السياسية.

Introduction

In the post-Cold War world where ideological differences became secondary to identity, inter-state conflicts were increasingly replaced by intra-state conflicts, leading to an expansion of the literature on ethnic conflicts. While most of these studies initially focused on ethnic identity as a whole, as time went by their focus narrowed to various aspects of one's identity as the more salient cause of these conflict. Out of this literature two main characteristics of identity came to forefront: language and religion.

Especially religion quickly became one of the most studied sources of conflict in our time. The choice was based on two reasons. First, religion was seen, by some, as a more important identity marker than other alternatives because of the importance of its four social functions:[1] a conceptual framework that helps us understand reality; a set of rules and standards that connects the individual's behavior with the framework; a source of organization in the society; and finally a legitimizer of actions and institutions. An aspect of the individual's identity capable of fulfilling these various societal functions was also argued to be the main source of that society's conflicts with others who do not share the same set of beliefs. The second reason was a more practical one. Based on the general perception that during the past couple of decades we experienced more and more religious conflicts, some made a connection between these and ethnic conflicts, emphasizing religion as a more salient characteristic of ethnic identity. Evidence supporting these arguments was far from being conclusive. Other candidates for the most salient aspect of one's identity were race and language. Some like Corm[2] argued that religion has never been the most salient aspect of identity. He went further and claimed that even in the most religious societies religion came fourth as an identity marker, after race, language, and geography.[3] It is of course natural to have a disagreement on the causes of identity conflicts because identity is an extremely complex concept and no conflict develops for one reason alone.

1 Jonathan Fox, "The Effects of Religion on Domestic Conflicts", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1998, pp. 44-8

2 Georges Corm, *21. Yüzyılda Din Sorunu: Jeopolitik ve Postmodernitenin Krizi,* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006).

3 ibid., p. 45.

The emphasis on the increase of religious conflicts was not misplaced. A brief look at the past decades support the argument that religion is playing an increasing role in politics and as a result is at the root of many political conflicts. Then, how can we account for the lack of evidence in the literature?[4] We argue that the problem was not focusing on the wrong concept but misevaluating it, more specifically the problem was not the concept of religious conflict, but the way it was conceptualized. The definitional problem we are dealing with is twofold. The first is related to the conflicts we focus on. Instead of defining "religious conflict" as conflicts where religion is the central issue, most of these studies only looked at conflicts between groups from different religions or sects. This narrowed down their area of study and showed that the increasing level of religious conflicts was not primarily due to conflicts between different religious traditions. We argue that there are two distinct categories of religious conflicts that need to be evaluated separately. This distinction was recently made by Fox[5] who adopted two categories: religious identity conflicts, where the two groups belong to different religions or denominations; religious wars, where the groups belong to the same religion and the conflict consists of religious fundamentalist challenges to more secular systems. We believe that the increasing number of conflicts predominantly belong to the latter category and that is the main reason why many studies fail to find support for their argument.

The second problem comes from the level of analysis these studies adopted. Because, following Huntington's cue, they focused on civilizational lines, trying to discover major conflict trends, they ignored differences between groups that formed these civilizations, assuming these civilizations were homogenous. As Norris and Inglehart[6] explain, there are "substantial contrasts found among one billion people living in diverse Islamic nations, such as Pakistan, Jordan, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Turkey, and the differences between Muslims who are radical or moderate, traditional or modern, conservative or liberal, hard-line or revisionist." They also point out that oversimplification

4 This lack of support was best shown at the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset where out of the 268 politically active minorities, only 105 were religiously distinct and that in only 12 cases religion was an issue at least as important as the others in that conflict (Fox 1998, p. 56).

5 Jonathan Fox, "The Increasing Role of Religion in State Failure: 1960 to 2004", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2007, p. 402.

6 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 136.

is equally inaccurate for "Western Christianity" where the similarities are superficial between "Catholic Mediterranean Europe and Protestant Scandinavia, as well as among social sectors and religious denominations within each country."[7] As a result, an approach that looks at religious or even sectarian differences often fails to account for the majority of religious conflicts present around the world.

Because we do not limit our scope to violent conflicts, for the purposes of this paper we thought it would be more appropriate to change the names of the categories presented by Fox'.[8] We will call Fox's first category, religious identity conflicts, as "religious-ethnic conflicts," where the primary issue is the power struggle between two or more ethnic groups for relative social position and power distribution that choose to mobilize their support along religious lines. In these conflicts religion is secondary to the main issue, nationalism. It is also often the case that "religion rarely initiates conflict, hostility and instability, but is exploited for political and particularly nationalist ends."[9] Fox's "religious wars,"[10] where two groups sharing the same belief system enter a conflict over the role of religion in society represent the main category we are interested in because they are the conflicts where religion is the main issue. We call these "religious conflicts."

These conflicts, we argue, form the category in which we have observed the most significant increase since the late 1980s. We also contend that religious conflicts are more prone to turning violent in most countries. Because these conflicts are directly over the role religion will play in that society, they influence the societal order and, as a result, they threaten to upset the existing balance of power in that society, making them more salient for all segments of that society. The trend we experienced in the past two decades, although parallel, must also be distinguished from the intra-state conflicts replacing inter-state conflicts because we argue that this is a part of a larger scale struggle between religious and secular sources of authority to gain dominance over the society. In order to control a given society

7 ibid., p. 136.

8 Jonathan Fox, 2007.

9 Martin Fuller, *Political Stability and Religion: Fundamentalism in Perspective*, (Wilton Park Paper 119, 1996), p. 39.

10 Jonathan Fox, 2007.

the political structure is the most important tool.[11] Assuming that this is the case, the most important question one needs to answer is if the increase in religious conflicts is global, why do we observe violence in some countries, but not others? The answer lies in the institutional structure and the type of religion. In consolidated democratic regimes these conflicts almost always take place within the lines of the existing political system where actors accept the legitimacy of the political structures. In more autocratic countries such conflicts tend to take more violent forms partly because opposition movements do not have other means to oppose the regime and partly because the institutions are not strong or trusted enough to fulfill the role of the referee needed when such issues rise in a society.

Over the past couple of years we experienced a number of changes in the Middle East, where authoritarian regimes were overthrown to be replaced by new political systems many of which remains to be seen. One development we have seen in all these countries was the rise of religiously based movements as contenders. Even though the issue is far from being settled, almost all of the post-revolutionary conflicts appear to be over the establishment of the new political system and the role Islam will play in it. Egypt is a good example for these conflicts because it is a country with a long history of competition between religious and secular politics. It also has one of the better organized Islamist movements that poses a serious challenge to the state structure that remains after Mubarak's departure.

The Rise of Religious Politics

Even though we can argue that the importance of religion remained constant for the individual in the long run,[12] religion's influence on group identity and politics greatly fluctuated in history. Until few centuries ago humans used to organize their social structures around their religious identities. This was recently replaced by other, more secular, identities. The shift created a tension between religious sources of authority and their secular counterparts, leading to a number of conflicts over time.

11 The cyclical trend we are focusing on is not the same with the cycles Haynes (1994, 147) observes in the last hundred years. They are also different from Karen Armstrong's who looks at it from the point of view of changes in religion.

12 Jonathan Fox, 2007, p. 397.

At the root of the conflict between religious and secular ideologies lies an effort to shape the society according to a certain value system. Since these value systems disagree on a significant point, the role religion will play in everyone's life, the conflict is often inevitable and extremely hard to solve. What differ secular ideologies from religious ones is the fact that the secular ideologies "are based on the belief in a set of principles that are mostly human in origin."[13] By definition these are relatively more flexible and somewhat more open to compromise. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, are strict with little or no room for compromise. Although religions vary in their doctrines and beliefs they share a common point when it comes to areas they claim to control, they are unwilling to share control with other sources of authority especially of human origin. It follows that "whether a religion mandates in detail a particular way of public life seems of much greater importance than many specific doctrines."[14]

As we stated earlier, the importance of religion in politics fluctuated greatly over time. These ups and downs were the result of the competition between religious and secular ideologies for political and societal dominance. The cyclical process goes as far back as the concepts of religion and politics but it should suffice to look at the most recent shift of power in that competition which coincided with the Middle Ages. The last major shift that replaced religion as the major force in politics occurred in the middle ages.

The Middle Ages were a time when the Church dominated the political scene. The medieval church not only acted as a state, but also provided the legitimacy behind the monarchy and civil order.[15] Religious authority, during this period, covered the society more completely and effectively than any existing secular authority. This power came from the Church's ability to lend legitimacy to secular authorities and these circumstances were not unique to the West. Despite beginning in "almost diametrically opposite political circumstances"[16] the conditions in the Islamic World were not significantly different. Even though the religious authority's structure was not similar to the medieval church,

13 Jonathan Fox, 1998, p. 48.

14 Steve Bruce, "Did Protestanism Create Democracy?", *Democratization*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2004, p. 4.

15 Mark Juergensmeyer, "The New Religious State", *Comparative Politics,* July, 1995, p. 382.

16 Carl L. Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 44.

the religious and political authorities were merged together from the start. This difference in starting points and organization gives us some clues on how secular ideologies eventually gained the upper hand in Christianity, but struggled to do so in Islamic countries. The Reformation movement and the Enlightenment were open conflicts between religious and secular centers of authority, supported by societal changes such as democracy and modernization, they brought, secular politics and gradually pushed religion outside the realm of politics, limiting its influence over the society. This process depended on replacing religion with secular ideology as a source of legitimacy and the creation of nation state that represented the society as a whole. This change was neither easy, nor fast. It also was not complete. Religion remained an important part of the individual's life. At a much slower pace and somewhat differently, the shift also took place in the Third World. In colonized parts of the world, despite the fact that colonization and missionary activities often went hand in hand, it was clear that the two had separate goals. This distinction survived even after independence was achieved. In most independence movements we have seen secular ideologies leading the way.

We observed a different trend in the Islamic World. This can be attributed to three factors. First and foremost the presence of the Ottoman Empire was a protective influence against European expansion and because the Ottoman Empire represented a religious source of authority the secularization process was delayed. The second factor is Islam's influence on politics. Even at places where Islam did not have a direct impact on the political system, it managed to remain influential because since the beginning, religious and political authority went hand in hand in Islam. The last factor was the general ineffectiveness of the missionary activities in the region. As a result, the secularization of politics only came to these countries during the last days of the Ottoman Empire and following the mandate period for many countries.

Once it was initiated, the process of secularization was believed to be reinforced by modernization. According to the modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s, economic development, urbanization, improved education, and advancements in science and technology "would inevitably cause the demise of the role of ethnicity and religion in politics."[17] It became especially clear following the end of the Cold War that this

17 Jonathan Fox, 1998, p. 51.

did not take place. While modernization argument failed at multiple fronts, two of them were critical to our argument. It failed to deliver on its promise that by following a certain path third world countries would achieve results comparable to their first world counterparts. Not only did the majority less developed countries fail to develop and modernize, many saw the gap between them and developed countries widen. This had a two-fold impact on these societies: a resentment of the West which was blamed, deservedly or not, for this failure; and a need to formulate alternative strategies to reach their goals. More often than not these alternative strategies were found in the past glory days of that society. A second impact of the modernization approach was the destruction of the existing social order. In order to create modern societies modeled after first world countries, modernizing regimes upset the existing social balances in their country which, after the experiment failed, left them with societies that were neither modern, nor traditional.

Starting with the 1970s, we began to observe a slow developing religious resurgence in many countries. More and more religious groups became involved in politics and religious ideologies were incorporated to existing secular ideology creating conflicts between the two in the process. Regardless of the country these movements were initially supported by marginal groups that were previously left outside politics and disappointed by the policies and strategies adopted. Haynes argued that the reason why religion gained significance at the time politically was partly because of the failure of "secular development programs to lead to sustained improvements in most people's well-being and partly as a result of the lack of legitimacy and accountability of secular rulers."[18] In countries where there was a democratic system firmly in place, this resurgence did not pose a problem. Such groups were incorporated to the existing system and competed in it according to the existing rules. In other places where legitimacy of the rulers was an issue, the rulers faced a choice between accommodating demands or blocking these groups' access to politics. When some of the secular leaders in undemocratic countries attempted to accommodate pressure from religious groups, they managed to alienate both sides and were considered traitors from both a religious and a secular point of view which only escalated to the conflict in the long run.[19] In cases where groups with a religious ideology were not given access to

18 Jeff Haynes, *Religion in Third World Politics*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 28.

19 Mark Juergensmeyer, 1995, p. 386.

politics and were repressed, things appeared to be calm as long as the regime preserved its strength, meaning that the inevitable conflict was only delayed rather than solved.

Many of the religious movements that surfaced during this period and sought to increase religion's influence over politics and society were categorized as "fundamentalists." As Haynes points out, fundamentalism can be defined as a "return to the basic principles and moral precepts of one's belief."[20] However, this is rarely the case with contemporary fundamentalist movements. What Haynes writes about fundamentalist Protestants is accurate for the majority of fundamentalists regardless of religion. These groups tend to have an "intolerant, intransigent set of beliefs" that denies not only members of other religions, but even the non-fundamentalist members of their own religion.[21]

While the behavior and thought process are common points for all fundamentalist movements there are certain areas they differ from each other. All fundamentalist movements aim to reshape the society according to their belief system, but not all try to create a theocratic state. One thing that distinguishes Islamic fundamentalists from others is their aim of a theocratic state. This should not be surprising considering that since the beginning "the New Muslim community – the *umma* – developed from a worldview that perceived religion and politics as a seamless web that thought of this world and the world to come as a continuum."[22] For Christian fundamentalists, for example, while the control of the state apparatus may be helpful to their goal of reshaping the society, changing the institutional structure of the state does not appear to be necessary. This is because the existing political structure is a product of the same historical tradition. That is not the case for Islamic fundamentalist movements. The political system in place is often seen as a Western invention and compared with all its faults to the former glory of their past political tradition. It follows that the existing system needs to be changed to one that is more in line with their religion and tradition.

As we have argued earlier, the paper posits that the increasing level of religious conflict cannot solely be contributed to the resurgent Islam

20 Jeff Haynes, 1994, p. 96.

21 ibid.

22 Carl L. Brown, 2000, p. 46.

and that it was a part of a general trend of rising religious political activity we witness around the world. Over the course of the last three or four decades we have seen governments, worried about religion's increasing influence and the support it receives leading them to banning various religious sects and political activity by religious organizations in countries as diverse as the Philippines, Jamaica, Ghana, and Nigeria.[23] In other countries, such as India, governments found it extremely hard not to give in to persistent demands by religious groups and their increasing number of representatives in the parliament.[24] Still in other countries, such as Sri Lanka, leaders used religious identity as a way of increasing their acceptance by their people and directly contributed to bringing religion in the political realm.[25] Of course, these are not the only examples of such movements, but a small sample that received attention in the literature. A less conflictual example came from Latin America, where we have seen the rise of the "liberation theology" that got Catholic priests increasingly involved in politics from the 1960s on.[26] In other countries, like Poland, attempts of the Church to play a major role in politics were only initially successful, but met strong resistance from the society later on.[27]

Egypt had to deal with demands from religious groups, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood. The regime's ability to deal with this challenge varied strongly depending on the leader in charge, a sign of institutional weakness. Such weakness does not pose a threat as long as the leader and the regime s/he represents are perceived to be strong enough to deal with challenges to their authority. When the regime is weak and a change seems possible various actors attempt to shape the new system based on their preferences. With only weak institutions that cannot act as a referee in place the process often turns violent.

Determinants of the Violence Levels in Religious Conflicts

Last fifty years' global trend towards more religion in society and politics did not reveal itself everywhere in the same manner. Especially, the level of violence of these religious conflicts varied greatly. Some

23 Jeff Haynes, 1994.

24 Mark Juergensmeyer, 1995.

25 ibid.

26 Jeff Haynes, 1994, p. 98-103.

27 Martin Fuller, 1996.

countries like the US managed to deal with such challenges within the institutional framework and according to the rules of the existing political system. In other places, such as Algeria, the political system disintegrated leading to long periods of violent struggle. Still other countries tried to deal with similar challenges without resorting to violence with various results. We argue that the path the conflict will take is determined by a combination of two main factors: the institutional strength and the type of religion of a given country.

The first dimension is institutional. When we look at the different experiences of various countries it becomes clear that countries with strong and established institutional structures and a democratic political system like the ones we see in the First World often manage to solve the conflict within that framework. There are, we argue, two reasons for this. First, because these are democratic countries, even the most extreme groups are allowed to participate in politics and openly try to advance their agenda. This freedom takes away the main justification for the use of violence: the inability to participate in peaceful politics. In addition, because these are well established institutional structures, the rules of political competition are set and known and accepted by everyone, creating a pressure on groups to behave according to those rules in order to maintain their legitimacy as the representatives of a just cause because a group that adopts violence when it can compete in a fair political system is not very likely to receive wide support.

The second, and more general, dimension is the type of religion. Especially during the last decade it is not uncommon to see somebody argue that certain religions are more violence prone than others, based on the perception that Islamic groups have been involved in an increasing number of conflicts.[28] This argument makes very little sense because it ignores a much greater number of Muslim groups that did not resort to violence. We contend that assuming there is such an increase, it is not because Islam is a more violent religion than others, but because most Islamic groups adopt a top-down approach of Islamization that requires the control of the central government. Such an approach raises the stakes of the conflict, increasing the likelihood of resistance and the escalation to violence. In many Christian groups we see a bottom-up approach where the state is an authority to be influenced in order to reach one's goals, but not an essential part of

28 Jonathan Fox, 2007.

the process. In the following two sections, we will evaluate these two dimensions in more detail, starting with the institutional strength, because we believe it is the more effective dimension in determining violence levels.

Institutional Strength

In any political system authority alone does not guarantee an institution's effectiveness. Naturally a certain degree of power is necessary for political institutions to enforce the rules of the political process however, regardless of the wide and sometimes special powers vested in them an institution cannot perform its functions unless it is perceived to be legitimate and possesses a credibility. Without the legitimacy and credibility not only the rulers, but the political system as a whole becomes open for challenges. To gain credibility and legitimacy institutions usually need two things: a good performance record that will help them earn people's trust and stability over time that makes their behavior predictable. When it comes to these factors we can categorize countries. The distinction is between the First and Third Worlds. The First World is predominantly democratic from a liberal tradition. These regimes consolidated over a relatively long period of time. They also have a secular tradition that goes back and separates religion and politics, effectively limiting religious ideologies' influence over politics and the society as a whole. The Third World countries, on the other hand, are former colonies that only recently gained their independence and adopted a variety of political systems. Their relatively short independent history and unstable political systems are the reasons we rarely see strong stable political institutions capable of earning the people's trust and fulfill the expectations.

In most of the First World, secularism is an essential character of the liberal democracy, meaning even the more religious portion of the population accepts that "religious imperatives be confined to the home, the family and the voluntary sector. Religion is confined to the realm of personal preference."[29] This acceptance is not always voluntary, but caused by the strength of the institutions the regime stands on. Although individuals and groups that do not believe in this principle need to challenge it through the rules and processes of the existing system, the rules of the political game are determined a long time ago and

29 Steve Bruce, 2004, p. 18.

performed relatively successfully ever since. This gives them the track record and credibility they need to be respected by the overall population. More often than not these groups end up failing in their challenge because of the freedom of participation in democratic political systems. This allows these groups to express their opinion and openly try to advance their cause, disarming them from their main justification to use violence as a tool to challenge the existing regime. Once they enter the stage of legitimate politics, religious groups face a choice, either they have to continue with their strict views and remain marginal on the political scene, or move closer to the mainstream to increase the support, but lose some of the more extreme parts of their ideology in the process. Regardless of the path these groups choose, it is clear that these polities are equipped with internal controls against challenges from extremist groups.

In most Third World countries, on the other hand, the institutional tradition does not extend too far back. In many, changing political regimes also mean changing political structures that cannot take firm roots. In others, the institutional structure reflects their colonial past because following their independence they usually kept the existing system while at the same time changing their content. Taking into consideration the mixed feelings their populations have about the colonial rule and the elites that were educated by those colonizers, it is no wonder these governments enjoyed little support from their people following the initial excitement of independence. Most of these states anyway witnessed coups, sometimes a series of them, that were against the ancient regimes like in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Yet, despite getting rid of the old elites, the new regimes also became authoritarian in time and became concerned with regime survival issues. Another reason for this lack of support is the perception that "ideologies like liberalism, socialism and communism (particularly as advocated by various purportedly 'secular' Arab governments) are perceived to have failed, both as mobilizing political credos, and in terms of satisfying people's needs including even their most basic economic needs."[30] With limited support from the people and adverse conditions to deal with in order to develop and improve the living conditions in their countries, these elites also did not do much to improve their chances by their wrong policies, and in many cases corruption. With weak and transplanted

30 Azza M. Karam, "Islamist Parties in the Arab World: Ambiguities, Contradictions, and Perseverance", *Democratization*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1997, p. 160.

political structures in place and elites with limited support running the political system, the strength of institutions is very low in these countries.

Dissatisfied with the results, starting with the 1970s, Third World opposition movements increasingly began to adopt religion as a mobilization point. As many argued, the main reason for religion to become an effective mobilization point was the failure of the transplanted secular ideologies adopted following the independence[31]or yet again the inability to bring development and prosperity as promised by the radical republican regimes in the Middle Eastern context. When opposition movements reacted to the existing regime they needed to present an alternative that would at the very least promise social justice. To find that alternative, in most cases, they had to turn to their pre-colonial periods and rediscovered old institutions that they claimed were better equipped for the country's needs and that had successfully worked in the past. Naturally, the emergence of religion as a source of mobilization for opposition movements was not solely due to the failure of secular ideologies. At this time religion enjoyed two important advantages over its ideological counterparts.[32] First and foremost, it interacted well with ethnicity and nationalism to create a "powerful ideological hybrid." Religious identity was already a part of ethnic identity and with ethnic nationalism gradually becoming more salient than civic nationalism these movements found support among ethnic nationalists emphasizing the religious aspect of the ethnic identity as the most important. Second, leaving its anti-modern rhetoric, religious movements managed to adapt itself to the modern era. Overall, religious ideologies were known for their inflexible nature and views. It has been important to preserve the original religion in order to avoid any modification of "God's Word." This of course, did not necessarily mean rejecting all things modern. Gradually, and encouraged by others' success in adopting certain aspects of modernity, religiously based opposition groups embraced the benefits of the modern world as long as they did not come to open conflict with their views.

Even though this explains why religion provides an important alternative to secular ideologies, it still does not say much on why this competition leads to violent conflicts in some countries and not others. That,

31 Jonathan Fox, 2007, p. 395; Jeff Haynes, 1994, p. 145.

32 Jeff Haynes, 1994, p. 145.

we contend, does not come from the characteristics of the religious politics, but from the certain aspects of the existing political structure. Many of the Third World countries are quasi democratic at best. Regardless of whether the regime is autocratic or quasi democratic, political participation is limited to the people lucky enough to obtain the rulers' approval. This control greatly limits the access to political office, especially for viable alternatives to the existing regime. Without a legitimate way of participating in politics, some of these groups choose to use other means in their struggle against governments they perceive to be illegitimate. Violence is one of such methods. If the goal is to change the regime and society to a more religious one, groups can try that by building up support among the population and coming to power with a large enough majority to do that, or, if that avenue is closed to them, they may try to remove the obstacle by using force. Since the regime that blocks access to politics is considered to be illegitimate, it becomes easier to justify the use of violence against it. In most cases, because of the repressive methods adopted by governments, such groups often claim that they are more democratic that the regimes they try to overthrow.[33] The limitations on political participation often goes beyond blocking access. Governments often use repression to stop these movements before they become a real threat.[34]

Religion

The second dimension aims to explain why, despite their relative institutional weakness and their lack of democratic tradition, some Third World countries are more likely to experience violence than others. We agree with Bruce (2004) when he says it is more important to look at how much of the daily life a religion regulates, than its specific doctrines. Because politics is an important way of influencing the daily lives of individuals, we believe it is important to add that the approach a religion adopts toward politics is one of the determinants of conflict and violence levels in that society.

Religions vary widely regarding the amount of daily life they regulate and their approach toward politics. While some religions, like Christi-

33 Steve Bruce, 2004, p. 18.

34 Two examples of such violent repression are Saddam Hussein executing the Shiite revivalist leader Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr in 1980 as the beginning of his repression of the religious opposition; and Hafez al-Asad's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood-led uprising at Hama in 1982.

anity, traditionally regulated a limited part of an individual's life, others, like Judaism or Islam, have a much larger scope that extends to all aspects of life. As a result, we argue, there is a significant difference how these two categories approach politics. The first group would more likely approach the issue from a bottom-up perspective, gradually increasing its influence at individual level and trying to re-shape the society one person at a time. This approach does not require a direct control of the state apparatus. Although the control of the state may make the process simpler, it is by no means necessary for the group's goals mainly because the regulations they hope to achieve are relatively mild and limited, the kind many people may be willing adopt. The second group, given the scope of the changes they aim, would benefit from a top-down approach. For them, the control of the state apparatus becomes crucial not only because it facilitates the adoption and application of necessary policies, but also it is one of the main power centers that can resist to such attempts. So, for politically active religions the control of the state does not only provide them with a tool that will spread their influence to the masses, but also means the removal of one of the major roadblocks on the way toward a more pious society.

This main difference does not explain the presence or the absence of violence by itself. In order to make better sense out of it, we have to look at it within the context of our first dimension, institutional strength. It is true that the control of the state is one of the main aims of Islamic political movements. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that this change must be through violence. In theory, just like any other religious political movement, there are two avenues available to them. They can either participate in the existing political system and try to gradually re-educate the masses "until these masses themselves call for an Islamic government" or forcefully seize state power to replace "un-Islamic leadership,"[35] or if they believe that they cannot achieve their goals that way, they can take up arms in order to take over the state apparatus. Unfortunately, the choice is almost never that simple. Because regardless of the initial method chosen, sooner or later the conflict escalates between groups with a different view of society and extremely skeptical about the others' vision of the future.

35 Azza M. Karam, 1997, p. 161.

In cases where religious groups select the gradual approach, their ultimate aim is clear to all others in that society, the control of the state apparatus and the transformation of the state and society according to their belief system. This knowledge tends to escalate the conflict in two ways. The group, after the denial of access to politics, may turn violent because the autocratic regimes that face such challenges tend to experience a spiral of repression and violence that sooner or later spins out of control. A second path toward violence goes through societal polarization. Because of their aims and their uncompromising ideology challenges from Islamic groups are not only opposed by governments, but also by less religious segments of the society. The high stakes make resistance more likely accordingly increasing the level of potential violence.

With these dynamics in place, it is more likely that we will see violent conflicts over the role of religion in politics and the daily life in countries with weak political institutions and institutional traditions. The institutional structure's ability to referee the process while providing necessary guarantees to all sides is key in determining the potential for violence. A second factor that determines the likelihood of violent conflict is the type of religion, in other words, how much of the daily life that religious ideology claims to control. In the following section we will try to test our argument on countries from different institutional strength levels and different religious traditions.

Struggle for Political Dominance in Egypt

Starting with the revolution of 1952 Egypt experienced a number of political systems all of which had one thing in common: they relied on the authority of Free Officers and their successors. As the political institutions changed over time, one thing that remained constant was the challenge of religious groups that all three presidents faced. The main source of religious opposition in Egypt has been Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood – MB, f. 1928) which had initially supported the revolution of 1952 along with secular elites. Muslim Brotherhood had the distinction of being the first Islamist organization.[36] They called for an Islamic government. Nasser tried to overcome this challenge by painting "an image of an Egypt that was culturally Muslim

36 ibid.

and politically secular."[37] This middle ground only worked until socialism was adopted, after which Nasser and Muslim Brotherhood came into conflict. An assassination attempt at Nasser in 1954 resulted in a crackdown campaign on MB in which some members were executed. Meanwhile, the MB's ideological and organizational integrity was eroding under the "general guidance" of Hasan al-Hudaybi. Hudaybi's gradualist approach, which defined the principal role of the MB as education (*tarbiyya*),[38] was subject to criticism from within the movement. Hudaybi believed that "the existing constitutional parliamentary framework in Egypt, if reformed, would satisfy the political requirements of Islam for a 'Muslim state'."[39] By contrast, Sayyid Qutb advanced a radical approach in terms of both thought and action. He defined the Egyptian society as un-Islamic (*jahilliya*) for violating God's sovereignty and called on for revolutionary action to bring the servitude of men to other men. This revolutionary action, jİhad, was to be carried out by true Muslims acting as vanguards of Islamic revolution and fighting against the infidels, including the nominal Muslims. The Qutbian revolutionary wing wanted to Islamize the Egyptian society in a top-down manner. Following Sayyid Qutb's active political action line, the "revolutionary" critics claimed that Hudaybi's MB is not a movement of words, but action. Qutb himself was executed during another crackdown campaign on the MB in mid-1960s. Judging from the formation of al-Takfir wa al-Hijra and Jama'iyya Islamiyya in late 1960s and proliferation of jihadist violence in the 1970s, it could be suggested that Qutb's radical ideas made long-lasting and profound impact especially on the younger generation of the MB and that Hudaybi's refutation of them in his booklet, entitled "Preachers, Not Judges" turned out to be futile attempt.

Nasser's successor Sadat styled himself as a 'believer-president', used religious themes to justify his policies, recognized sharia as the primary source of legislation, released MB leaders from prison, allowed the organization to publish its own newspaper, and encouraged high levels of religious observance and the development of Islamic Student Associations so as to check the leftist student movement.[40] He also le-

37 Mark Juergensmeyer, 1995, p. 385.

38 Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, (OUP: New York and Oxford, 1993 [1969]), p. 308.

39 ibid, p. 235.

40 Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Social Change in Egypt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 95-6.

galized the multi-party system in 1980, but the system remained under the control of the President and his Party, i.e. the National Democratic Party founded by Sadat himself. Sadat, therefore, ruled no less autocratically then his predecessor Nasser. In the absence of democratic channels for expressing discontent and demand, Sadat's efforts to accommodate Islamists were not enough to prevent the development of the above-mentioned Qutbian revolutionary, jihadist, and violent groups. Consequently, in the 1970s Coptic Christians, state officials, and premises like military college in Cairo, were attacked by those jihadist groups. Eventually Sadat himself, after signing a separate peace agreement with Israel, was assassinated by a jihadist group in 1981. This was an open challenge to the regime. Islamist groups were disturbed by Sadat's pro-American and pro-Israeli policies, but at the same time they believed that they could successfully challenge the regime.

Mubarak followed Sadat's presidency and adopted a slightly different strategy of accommodation. While he accommodated mainstream religious groups, he adopted a harder line against more extremist Islamists. The Mubarak regime has aimed to contain Islamic activism since 1989.[41] This involved re-imposition of state control on the spheres the MB had been most influential like the private mosques and professional associations. In addition, the regime arrested and detained the prominent figures of the MB regularly and arbitrarily so as to intimidate the movement. In so doing, the Mubarak regime benefited from the Emergency Law, reintroduced in the immediate aftermath of Sadat's assassination and repeatedly extended until 2012. The law declared a state of emergency in Egypt and gave the state authorities to suspend the constitutional rights, censor publications, prohibit demonstrations, detain individuals on shaky grounds without submitting them to courts. However, while containing activist Islam, the Mubarak regime simultaneously tried to foster its own Islamic credentials by favoring a non-mobilizational and non-pluralist Islam represented by al-Azhar's conservative clergy.[42] Mubarak's strategy indicated "the state's willingness to accept religious authority as the ultimate referent in matters previously under the control of secular institutions."[43]

41 ibid., p. 104.

42 Alexander Flores, "Secularism, Integralism and Political Islam: The Egyptian Debate," in *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, (London: I.B Tauris, 1997).

43 Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, The State and Islamism*, (London: I.B Tauris, 2003), p. 76.

The Egyptian example shows a political system that is not known for its democratic qualities where opposition groups are treated differently depending on the political leader in power. Egypt's shifts between accommodation and repression showed that there was not a consistent way the state apparatus handled these challenges and showed that even though the institutions that were in place were the same for the most part what ultimately mattered was the leader's preferences. While on the one hand this meant that the policies could be changed relatively easily, it also created the perception that a forced leadership change, the only possible kind, may result in agreeable policies by his/her successor.

Challenges faced by Egyptian Presidents were not unique to this country. A number of countries had to deal with pressure from religious groups. As we have argued earlier, the response changed depending on the institutional structure and religion of these countries. Out of these countries two deserve to be mentioned. First is the United States because it represents an example where strong institutions are capable of conforming extreme challenges, pulling them to the center and forcing them to change in order to become a part of the political system. Another is Turkey not only because it is a Muslim country with an medium level political structures, but also because it is often mentioned as an example to Middle Eastern countries that are going through regime change.

The religion's challenge in the United States initially developed as Evangelical groups increasingly became interested in the political process starting with the 1960s. The new interest in politics came following the idea that nothing in this world should be outside of "God's lordship" and that Christians should be more active in changing the world they live in instead of trying to avoid it.[44] The movement expanded from bottom up starting with local politics and gradually moving to presidential elections. Along the way they remained within the framework of political structure and played the political game as the long-established rules dictated. This does not necessarily mean that groups like Moral Majority and Christian Coalition were any less fundamentalist than Islamic Jihad or Hezbollah. As Bruce explains it so well, "to their 'home boys', they can denounce divorce and homosexuality

44 Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States,* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1992), p. 230

as contrary to the will of God, but to the electorate they had to argue that such practices are socially harmful. (…) In so doing, they accept rules of engagement that ensure they will lose."[45] Despite their minority status, such groups managed to be relevant more recently due to their double strategy: convincing evangelical Protestants to participate in politics and supporting candidates who endorse their programs and policies.[46]

This trend seemed to peak during George W. Bush's presidency, but failed to shape the system according to their own preferences. Republican's choice of Mitt Romney, who is considered to be a centrist relative to other candidates competing during the primaries, for this year's presidential elections may be interpreted as a sign that at least some of the more conservative groups within the party are willing to move closer to the center. Even though how the defeat will be interpreted remains to be seen, the proportion of the popular vote he received seems promising for the future and that is a very good example of how political structures are supposed to pull extreme groups to the center in the long run.

As the United States shows when there are strong institutions in place, the political system can resist challenges without additional assistance. More importantly, the struggle is not violent and instead of alienating certain groups by attempting to keep them outside politics, it incorporates them in the existing political system forcing them to conform.

Turkish experience represents the middle ground where political structures are present and exist independently from the leader. However, as the number of interruptions show they are not strong enough to face challenges without assistance.

Turkey has a democratic system that experienced a number of disruptions since the 1920s. During this period, there has not been an effective and systematic repression of the religious opposition like we have seen in Egypt. Moderate Islamist parties were allowed to participate in regular elections, but their ability to become influential actors were limited by frequent closing of these parties. These characteristics led Turkey to experience more conflict than the US, which almost never turned violent like it did in Egypt.

45 Steve Bruce, 2004, p. 17.

46 Kenneth D. Wald, 1992, p. 255-6.

Turkish institutions that are traditionally relied on to perform checks on government power, like the judiciary, are not nearly strong enough to effectively perform their duty. As a result, other, less conventional extra-systemic institutions such as the military takes it upon itself to provide that check and deal with challenges to the political system. The reliance on non-political organizations for the wellbeing of the political system is less than ideal for any democratic system and shows the distrust in political institutions. Such arrangements are often used during early years of political systems in order to provide stability for new regimes until they establish a track record that will contribute to their credibility among the population. Turkey belongs to a small group of countries where these arrangements remained in place even decades after the political system was first established.

Over the past decade this structural arrangement changed significantly and the military was gradually pushed out of politics. While the depoliticization of the military allows governments to act more freely, it also creates a need to develop alternative structures. Without effective monitoring of the government power Turkey, like any other country in similar circumstances, is more likely to take the authoritarian route than the democratic one. Even though the uncertainty regarding the future of Turkish political structure increases the potential for future conflict, the presence of relatively established institutions and a democratic tradition makes it much less likely that the conflict will turn violent.

Egypt began its transition period when the president/leader-centered and de facto single party regime came to an end in 2011. The downfall of the old Egyptian regime was triggered by mass public demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square and elsewhere, but the military's refusal to comply with the presidential orders to repress the demonstrators was perhaps more decisive. Since then, the Egyptian regime is in making. Two major political forces, namely the military and the MB, that would by and large determine the shape of the new regime are themselves in a process of transition and their relationship has oscillated between cooperation and collusion. The military's Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), which was critical in the downfall of the Mubarak regime, took over the power to oversee the transition process and laid out a plan declaring the stages of the transition to the new regime and their timing. The SCAF wanted to protect the military's privileges and autonomy from civilian oversight by way of constitutional design and by getting a friendly figure elected as the President. It also wanted to

rule the country from behind the scenes and without taking any responsibility.

The SCAF's design put the MB in an awkward position The MB, as the most organized civilian political force of the country, would dominate the parliament and but lack power to run the country. Moreover, this would happen when the MB was compelled to politicize, i.e. to take political responsibilities, in order to maintain its organizational integrity in the relatively free post-revolutionary political atmosphere. This meant that the MB could not acquiesce with the SCAF's design. In the ensuing power struggle, the MB-dominated parliament dissolved with the help of the judiciary. This weakened the legitimacy and legal standing of Islamist-dominated constituent assembly, which was elected by the parliament to make the new constitution. Meanwhile, just minutes after the polls closed in the runoff voting for presidential elections, on June 17, 2012, the SCAF announced that it assumed legislative powers, and power to appoint a new constituent assembly, if the current one fails. Sensing that the MB candidate M. Morsi will get elected as the President, the SCAF also curtailed president's powers to declare war and control military.

A month later, President Morsi has managed to sack the top brass and revoked the SCAF's June 17 decisions. Morsi himself assumed legislative powers and power to appoint a new constituent assembly. The fact that the SCAF, unlike the Free Officers, lacks mass public support and exclusively concerned with protecting its privileges has perhaps helped Morsi in taking this initiative. Currently, the SCAF seems to be content with protecting the military's privileges and personnel from democratic scrutiny in return for giving up "the right" to rule. The upper hand therefore seems to have shifted to the President Morsi and his MB. Bearing in mind that there are no effective mechanism other than the courts to check and balance the powers of the President and that the courts refrain from taking bold decisions partly because they have to work with and struggle against a complex web of political forces in this transition process puts the MB in an advantageous position. Does this mean Egypt is in an Islamization process? The MB would probably open up avenues for the Islamist inclinations to enter into state institutions rather than pursuing an identifiable Islamic agenda. One, therefore, has to wait and see the future trajectory of Islam in Egypt. The MB's incrementalism introduces the possibility of (further) moderation as secular political forces start reorganizing. Both the Salafist push

to the extremes as well as the age-old Islamic parameters of political system, however, signal the limits to secularism in Egypt.

Egypt's legal-constitutional infrastructure is still in making. Although it will be misleading to claim that institutional arrangements will determine the political behavior of the Egyptians, they will certainly encourage some and discourage some others by way of drawing the boundaries of the legitimate sphere of politics. One cannot but hope that a liberal-democratic framework, in which the rights-based political discourses and alternatives would be free from majoritarian threats, will be accepted as the new ground for Egyptian politics. The Egyptians have already proved that the Orientalist framework that restricts the options of a Muslim majority country to either illiberal Islamism or authoritarian 'secularism' is false. After all, the Egyptian "revolution" was initiated by the various non-Islamist forces. A liberal-democratic framework, in this respect, would do justice to the revolution as well.

Conclusion

We have argued that the religious resurgence in politics was a part of the conflict between religious and secular ideologies that took place on regular basis. This cyclical shift in dominant ideology has been taking place for a very long time and worldwide. This, we contended, should not be confused with ethnic religious conflicts and pose a much bigger threat to global stability.

In order to determine the likelihood and the level of violence in religious conflicts we focused our attention on the institutional strength that set and enforced the rules of political competition and the type of religion the country's population predominantly believes in. The institutional strength not only allows access to politics without necessitating the use of violence, it also protects the institutional integrity of the political system in the long run. The type of religion gives us a clue on what groups representing that religion may ask for. Although it may be a useful tool, the control of the central authority may not be necessary for certain religious groups' goals.

We use Egypt as an example with the US and Turkey as reference points. Egyptian case is important because as a major Middle Eastern country it is likely to set an example for other countries in the region going through regime change. The uncertainty in the region following

the fall of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and potentially others, is a cause for concern for the rest of the world. Depending on how the political landscape is shaped in these countries will determine the future of relations throughout the region. Our examples show us that unless a country has well-established political institutions with a long track record like the US, it is safe to assume that the political system is in flux with the potential for change depending on domestic and international changes they face. From this point of view there is very little difference between Turkey and Egypt. What is more significant is that the level of institutional strength appears to be the main determinant of the level of violence a country may experience during these conflicts, pushing the belief system to a secondary position.

It is clear that a single case only allows us to draw limited conclusions and that such an important issue deserves a more detailed look. Luckily the developments in the Middle East provide us with opportunities to expand the scope of our study by looking at a number of other cases that are currently going through similar transition periods.

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